

Galatians 5:16-26 ~ Scripture Verses

Life by the Spirit

¹⁶ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. ¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Discussion Questions and Self-Rating

1. What two forces are constantly fighting in your life? (5:16-18)
2. Why does Paul keep saying that if you follow the Holy Spirit, you are no longer under the law? Does the law have no purpose for Christians? (5:18, 2:16, Rom 7:4-25)
3. How do you behave when you follow your own desires? How many sinful acts does Paul list? Can you name any others? (5:19-21)
4. Why do you follow your own desires when you “know” that you should not?
5. What is the ultimate consequence of following your own desires? (Verse 5:21)
6. Rate yourself honestly on the fruits of the Spirit in your own life on a scale of 1 to 10. 10 means this is the way I act today, 1 means I have a long way to go on this item.

_____ **LOVE.** Love is pre-eminent in my life. I see all people through the eyes of Christ. I have a deep compassion for the lost, the lonely, the weak and the poor. I am magnanimous towards those who “get in my hair.” I keep no record of wrongs. I give selflessly, sometimes till it hurts. I go the extra mile. I would rather forgive 20 injuries than avenge one. God always comes first.

_____ **JOY.** People know me for my joyful disposition even when there is a cause to grieve. There is a contagious radiance about me because “the joy of the Lord is my strength.” I remain strong and positive when things go wrong because I trust in God. I am quick to see the brighter side of things. I know that for my shattered plans, God has better plans. My contentment springs from the knowledge that God is sovereign and Jesus is coming, again.

_____ **PEACE.** The peace of God rules my heart and mind. I stay calm in disturbing situations because my eyes are fixed on Jesus. With few exceptions (and I’m working on these) I enjoy wholesome and beautiful relationships all round. Whenever relationships are

strained or fractured I take the initiative in moving toward healing and restoration. I can see the dark spots in my own life and am quick to confess them. I am willing always to pay the price of being a peace-maker in a world of bruised relationships.

_____ **PATIENCE.** I never make hasty judgements or speak hasty words. I am not quick at jumping to conclusions. I am patient with people when they fail or fall. I face opposition and discouragement with composure. I never give up. I keep cool while others are hot. I am not irritable or easily angered. My “tolerance level” is extremely high. I can put up with a lot. I accept people for who they are—and not for how they perform. When I confront others, they feel I do so because I care!

_____ **KINDNESS.** People feel “love's touch” when they're around me. I am blessed with a M-I-L-D disposition (though, occasionally, I do turn that “M” upside down). I let God deal with the bitterness, anger and malice in my heart. A deep respect and consideration for others, coupled with a forgiving spirit, makes relating to people such a pleasure! The kindness of Jesus is seen in me.

_____ **GOODNESS.** The goodness of God touches my life and then overflows into the lives of others. I am a caring person, a friend and neighbor to many. A genuine benevolence characterizes my life. When I see a need, I respond to it in the compassion of Christ. I am sensitive to the evil and suffering around, and seek to be an instrument of God's liberating touch. Uplifting the quality of people's lives is a major concern to me.

_____ **FAITHFULNESS.** I make promises—and keep them. I am a man of my word. People can count on me. There is no gap in what I say and what I do. Fidelity is the hallmark of my marriage and other commitments. I do not flirt with the world—or with anyone. I am true to the Lord, to my spouse, to people, and to causes that God entrusts to me. They are all sacred to me!

_____ **MEEKNESS.** I am willing “to go under” any yoke that God wants me to—to be SUBMISSIVE to God—and to one another out of our mutual reverence for Christ. I freely and willingly accept all that God, in His providence, gives or withholds from me. I am willing to step “under the yoke” with Christ and my co-workers in kingdom service. I am willing to step aside when it is time to do so. I bring myself under the authority of Christ and His Church. I can “glory in my infirmities so that the power of God may be made manifest in me.” I bear provocation without being inflamed by it. I give a soft answer when angry words are spoken. I respect my own rights and the rights of others, willing to give up mine if the Lord so guides me. I am a pro-actor not a re-actor. I relate to others as one among sinners—never arrogantly.

_____ **SELF-CONTROL.** The key to my life is self-mastery. I am temperate in my thoughts, words, and actions. I live a disciplined life-in private and in public. I have complete mastery of my body, my mind, my emotions and will, my time, my possessions, my desires and appetites. I never lose control. I don't eat too much, drink too much, work too much, play too much, or sleep too much: no excesses whatever! Jesus is Lord over every area of my life!

7. What is Paul's warning to those who feel they are living in the Spirit? (5:26)

Galatians 5:16-26 ~ Leader's Guide

1. What two forces are constantly fighting in your life? (5:16-18)

1) "Living by the Spirit" and 2) "gratifying the desires of the sinful nature [or flesh]", i.e., the Holy Spirit and our sinful nature (which includes both evil desires that come from Satan as well as inclinations that stem from our bodies). Paul says if we try to overcome our sinful nature by our own willpower, we will fail (5:17 – "you do not do what you want") but he implies that the Holy Spirit is infinitely stronger than our sinful nature and we must call upon the Spirit and let ourselves be led by the Spirit.

2. Why does Paul keep saying that if you follow the Holy Spirit, you are no longer under the law? Does the law have no purpose for Christians? (5:18, 2:16, Romans 7:4-25, especially v. 7)

(We considered this question earlier in Ch 2, but Paul keeps bringing it up.)

In summary, Romans 7 says that the law really exposes our sinful nature and need for a savior. In v. 7 Paul establishes that the law itself is not sin, but rather exposes sin. For example, he says "I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'" He enlarges on this and concludes in v. 12, "But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good." [CEV] Paul goes on to say that when it comes to the righteous deeds of the law, he continually came up short in compliance. In v. 15 he says "for that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." He realizes that he fails to make the cut in his venture to keep the law in light of James 2:10 ("For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.") But here's the good news: law-keeping is not what makes you righteous in the first place; it's the Holy Spirit living in you that makes the Christian life work.

3. How do you behave when you follow your own desires? How many sinful acts does Paul list? Can you name any others? (5:19-21)

In verses 19 and 20, Paul enumerates 16 vices such as idolatry and jealousy that stem from following your own sinful nature.

1. Sexual immorality

2. Impurity (includes adultery and even impure thoughts. Matthew 5:28 – But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.)

3. Debauchery (Indulgence in sensual pleasures; scandalous activities involving sex, alcohol, or drugs without inhibition.)

4. Idolatry (Worship of false gods, but also idols such as money, popular celebrities, children's activities and achievements, an object of infatuation.)

5. Witchcraft and sorcery

6. Hatred and hostility

7. Discord (Tension or strife resulting from a lack of agreement; dissension.)

8. Jealousy (there is a positive sense of jealousy; this is the negative sense)

9. Fits of rage, outbursts of anger
10. Selfish ambition
11. Dissensions (Strong disagreement; a contention or quarrel)
12. Factions, divisions
13. Envy
14. Drunkenness
15. Orgies (Wild parties; in the past festivals that honored pagan gods)
16. "...and the like" or "...other sins like these." Other vices are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible such as arrogance (2 Cor 12:20), murder and lying (Rev 22:12-16), wild living (Luke 15:13), cheating, adultery, homosexuality, greed, stealing (1 Cor 6:8-10), and failing to honor the Sabbath or ones parents.

4. Why do you follow your own desires when you "know" that you should not?

5. What is the ultimate consequence of following your own desires? (5:21)

Paul doesn't mince any words about this. He says plainly and directly that you will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now this doesn't mean that those who sin will go straight to hell. We all sin. But Paul is saying that if you *deliberately* follow the sinful nature and do not look to the Holy Spirit for guidance and to the Father for forgiveness, you are doomed.

6. Rate yourself honestly on the fruits of the Spirit in your own life on a scale of 1 to 10. 10 means this is the way I act today, 1 means I have a long way to go on this item.

The motto of Cornell University is "Freedom with Responsibility." Rev. Neville Koch, who made up this rating form on fruit of the Spirit, is reminding us that although these character traits are a by-product of living for God, they carry with them a responsibility of thought, willingness, and action. These virtues are not meant to simply reside in our mind to make us feel good, but to put to action and shared with others.

(<http://levelpath.wordpress.com/2007/10/16/fruit-of-the-spirit-rating-scale/>)

James 2:14-17 – ¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

7. What is Paul's warning to those who feel they are living in the Spirit? (5:26)

The Oxford Bible commentators feel that the "headline" in 5:16 and instruction in 5:26 are rather bland exhortations although 5:15 confirms that these exhortations were sorely needed in the Galatian churches. And today too?!